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## The November 2010 Elections: Verification and Nuclear Weapons Reduction

IBPP Editor  
[bloomr@erau.edu](mailto:bloomr@erau.edu)

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Title: The November 2010 Elections: Verification and Nuclear Weapons Reduction

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**Abstract:** The author discusses the results of the November 2010 elections in the United States (US), the transition of power between two very different Senates, and US participation in international treaties pertaining to nuclear weapons. Of note, are the roles of and problems with the idea of verification as per modern logical positivism.

As the dust is still settling over the results of the November 2010 elections in the United States (US), a growing concern emerges as to the possibility that the US Senate may not ratify the latest strategic arms reduction treaty signed between the US and Russia in April 2010. In parsing the professed objections of the, presumably, loyal opposition, one may identify at least six issues. First, some senators and their backers seem to be willing to do just about anything to prevent a political success for the Obama administration. Second, some of them assert that the treaty language may be interpreted to prevent some US anti-missile and other defensive programs from going forward without Russian concurrence. Third, some advocate that the treaty will not allow or will render difficult the modernization of allowable nuclear weapons capabilities and conventional strike forces. Fourth, some advocate that the treaty--because it does not cover tactical nuclear weapons--is fatally flawed. Fifth, some of them seem to believe that any reduction or mere maintenance of nuclear weapons capabilities saps US security. And sixth, the Russians will cheat because they can, and they can because accurate verification cannot be carried out.

The following is a modification of a 1997 IBPP article on the verification of nuclear weapons.

Verification often proves to be a significant stumbling block in developing, negotiating, evaluating, signing, ratifying, and implementing weapons limitation, reduction, and nonproliferation treaties—as well as agreements to maintain present capabilities. One part of the stumbling block comprises the varied philosophical assumptions--conscious and unconscious--permeating the belief systems of policymakers, negotiators, and legislators as to verification.

Many of these political actors speak and act as if they are radical logical positivists—even if they've never heard the term before. They believe that verification must be built on observation and observable data with crystal clear interpretations completely corresponding to reality based largely on pure notions of deductive and inductive logic. This reality instantiates as a material world and there is an ideational world dependent on observable data and interpretation which ensures a one-to-one correspondence based on logical intermediaries. Total confirmation or disconfirmation of a party's compliance with a treaty can definitely be attained. It's almost as if the intrapsychic processes of the parties to the treaty are non-existent or irrelevant.

The more moderate logical positivists—while adhering to belief in reality as the material world, the import of observation, and the necessity of rigorous, intermediary and logical procedures—allow that confirmation or disconfirmation may not be total. Instead, the latter may be partial but approaching totality through accumulation of data. Induction and deduction may approach complete accuracy as they seem to almost total disengage from well-known logical problems—the specific counter-example

to a general conclusion well-known in induction, culture-bound leaps of faith on soundness and validity between assumptions and conclusions in deduction.

Unfortunately, significant problems occur with the logical positivist approach to verification. (1) Much of what we observe is dependent on our sensory modalities. Yet through technological advances, we have discovered that there is more to the world than what we can sense. And even with ever-newer technological advances, realms of the world more obviously seem to exist beyond the technology-mediated observable. And, of course, as we depend on technology to broaden our knowledge of the world, we lose our direct experience of this world. By demanding observable criteria, the weapons-treaty developer or evaluator is not being hard-nosed, but soft-headed. Realms of the world are being discounted as irrelevant and meaningless to the detriment of security. The limitations of observation are further illustrated by well-documented illusions--the products of normative human perception--and by the vagaries of observation depending on need state--hunger, fatigue, anger, fear, need to believe in an enemy, and so on. This is the case regardless of combinations of technical and human intelligence is the resource.

(2) Building on this last point, we might note that the logical positivists discount most if not all of mental phenomena—certainly in the party to the treaty—because the latter cannot be satisfactorily observed but only inferred. But histories seem to suggest—from the Chan-kuo Ts'e through The Peloponnesian War to modern journalistic accounts of ethnocentric conflicts—that intentions, beliefs, and all the other mental constructs mentioned above are heavily involved in security matters. This applies not just to the adversary, ally, neutral, or other, but to one's own side and one's very self. In fact, what about the logical positivists' beliefs concerning observation, the material world, and logic? What do we make of these beliefs in light of the positivists' critique of beliefs? What do the positivists make of their beliefs in light of their belief critique?

(3) We also must note that logical positivists and other humans do not live their lives outside of national security dilemmas as if logical positivism were the case. In matters of love, work, and various aspirations our behaviors (based on introspection, consensual, interpersonal validation, and socio-cultural conditioning via mass media) seem largely based on nomological networks of constructs having less and less association with direct experience. We seem to accept this state of affairs in others as well even as we may be on firmer, philosophical ground with ourselves.

(4) And what of the dissimulator? And our own self-deception? And the historicity of mental processes? And because we have not directly observed most of history, does that mean most of history does not exist? Or if history is defined by procedures of discovery, does a historical statement that the Hittites conquered the Egyptians denote the past? Or does it denote only a future becoming a present once we follow certain procedures of historiography which may be subverted by the hermeneutics of suspicion?

In the world of treaty development and evaluation, the verifiers—regardless of what they profess—act and always have acted as what we now call postmodernists. They develop, share, conflict over, and deconstruct narratives of reality. Ultimately, their notions of deterrence, correlation of forces, offensive and defensive capabilities, and destabilization are no different than notions of love and hate, of sentiment, of unconscious psychodynamics engaged in shadow play.

Return now to the results of the 2010 elections. Both the lame duck Senate and the new Senate poised to begin work are les canards enchaînés [chained ducks referring to the French satirical newspaper founded in 1915]. Only the humor is unintended. And this can be verified.

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